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8TH DISTRICT, NORTH CAROLINA

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July 6, 2020

The Honorable Robert Wilkie  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs  
810 Vermont Avenue, NW  
Washington DC 20420

Dear Secretary Wilkie,

We write to you today to request immediate action to expand the Department of Veterans Affairs Open Burn Pit Registry to include Syria as a location that grants eligibility to veterans or servicemembers to participate in the registry. While we are aware of current Department of Defense guidelines on toxic exposure, we ask that you consider this request as we work together to continue to provide the best care possible for our nation's veterans.

As you know, this registry was originally established under the Dignified Burial and Other Veterans Benefits Improvement Act of 2012. Given the significant exposure of US servicemembers to open burn pits in Syria, we believe their exposure during US operations in the area meets the same intent for coverage that was previously granted to veterans serving in Iraq, Afghanistan, and the Southwest Asia theatre of operations.

In an April 2019 report to Congress, the Department of Defense noted the significant exposure of servicemembers to burn pits across the Middle East to include Syria. The inclusion of Syria in this analysis shows a demonstrated concern on behalf of the Department of Defense regarding the continued operation of these pits in the region.

Previously, the Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs has acted under the authority granted to him to expand the Open Burn Pit Registry to include the 2014 expansion that was designed to capture exposure of Persian Gulf War Veterans. Similarly, we believe that the continued operation of US troops in Syria should qualify them for the same inclusion in the registry.

With this in mind, we ask that you exercise your authority as Secretary to expand the Open Burn Pit Registry to include those who have served in Syria.

Sincerely,



Richard Hudson  
Member of Congress



Raul Ruiz  
Member of Congress

Other Members of Congress signing this letter:

Katie Porter

Carolyn B. Maloney

Donald S. Beyer Jr.

Trent Kelly

Troy Balderson

Roger Marshall, M.D.

Neal Dunn

Scott R. Tipton

Gregory F. Murphy, MD.

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Lee Zeldin

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